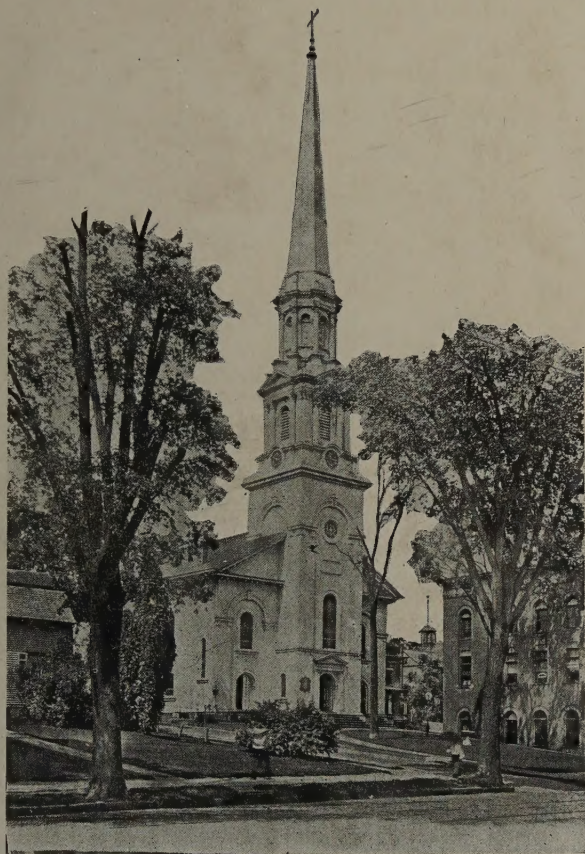
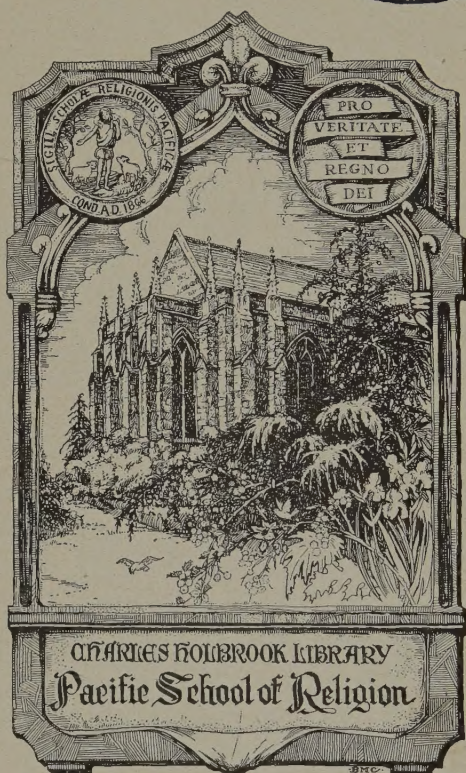
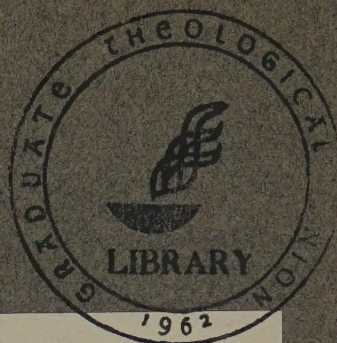


The Story of the
First Church Spire



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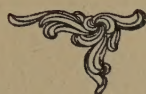




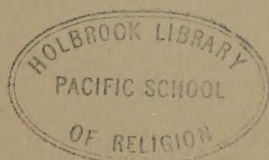
"MY PASTOR."

The Story of the First Church Spire

BY H. C. M E S E R V E



Written for the Children of the First Church of
Danbury, Connecticut, Children's Day, June twelfth
one thousand nine hundred and four



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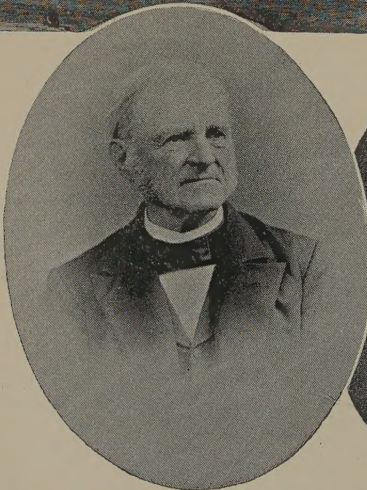
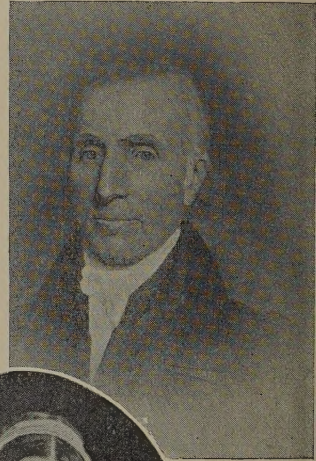
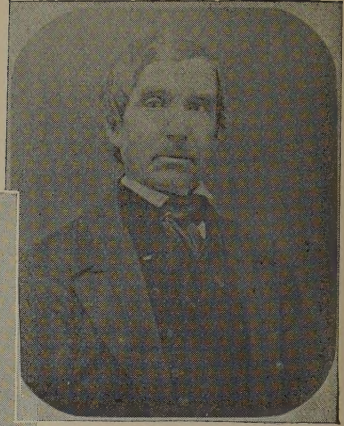
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My Father in His Last Days and Some of His Helpers.



The Story of the First Church Spire.

I am the Spire of the Old First Church, and I want to tell you children the story of my family and my own story.



MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER was a very little spire and he stood guard over the first church building in this settlement when there were only a few people here and the houses were very widely separated. He knew the first pastor of this church very well, and the traditions which he set on foot of that good man are still recalled by some. He told my GRANDFATHER that those were "good old days" and that the people of that time were so strong physically, and so splendid morally and spiritually that their children were bound to be good men and women. Now this was over two hundred years ago, and while I believe all that my GREAT-GRANDFATHER has said about the people of his time, I think the good old New England stock is about as good to-day as it ever was, and it always has been the best there is. Of course the people of my GREAT-GRANDFATHER's time had to be brave men. They had to win the country

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from the wilderness and protect themselves from the Indians while they were doing it; but they succeeded, and when my GREAT-GRANDFATHER died in 1719, at the early age of 33 or 34, he hardly knew the place where he had been raised, it had changed so much. Perhaps I ought to say that my GREAT-GRANDFATHER was a very little fellow. So small in fact, that he was only known probably by the place he ought to have been, but for me he has always existed, for I cannot conceive of a church without a steeple.

Well, my GRANDFATHER was born just before my GREAT-GRANDFATHER died, and in his lifetime he saw many stirring scenes. My GREAT-GRANDFATHER's church was a very little building, only 30x40, while my GRANDFATHER's church was 35x50 and this was afterward increased to 65 feet so that his church was just about as long as this church is wide. Of his personal appearance I know nothing, but hope he was at least a little larger than my GREAT-GRANDFATHER for he needed to be to take in all that happened in his life-time. He not only saw the church grow, but he saw a nation born and he saw the battle for the life of that nation raging before his very eyes. But like his people he never winced, and I have no doubt that he bore to the day of his death the scars of that fight. It is said by some that he was burned on that day when the British came to town, but others say that it was his BROTHER. I do not know which one it was but I am sure they were both brave enough to stand anything.

After the long war things settled down a bit and the people began to prosper and the the town to grow. Now while we spires like to see our people get on in the world and multiply, all the changes incident to this development mean death to us, and so it came to pass

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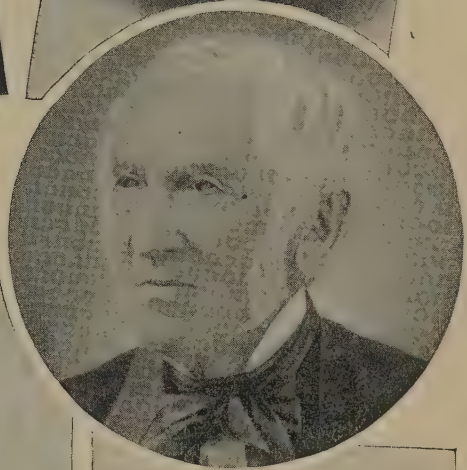
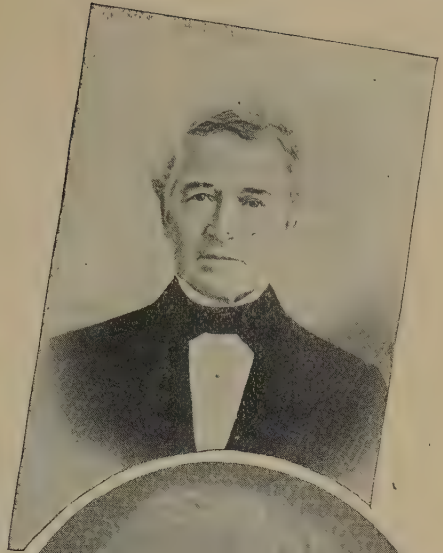
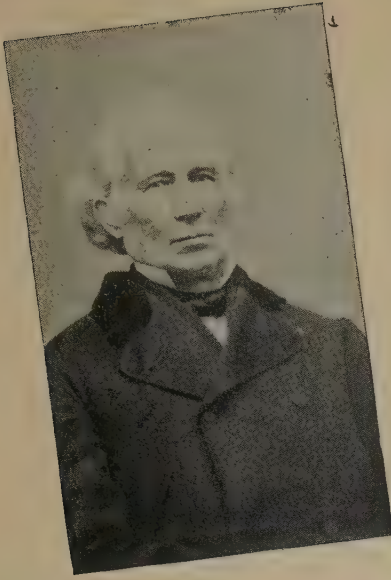
that in 1786 my GRANDFATHER died aged 67 years. The cause of his death was "too much prosperity."

Very late in my GRANDFATHER'S life my FATHER was born and he grew to be a spire of splendid stature. He was 135 feet high and he looked every foot of it. The church over which he stood guard was 45x60, which was very good size indeed for his day. It was finished and furnished in the dignified manner of the times. My father saw the first organ installed in his church, for up to this time the instrument had been the bass viol and the chorister used a tuning fork. I cannot tell you all the things my FATHER saw, for his life was a comparatively peaceful one, but about twenty years before his death he met with a sad accident which he said was the cause of all the misfortunes which befell the church he loved and which he adorned. You know I told you that the prosperity of the people was the reason for all our troubles. It was never so perfectly illustrated as in this case. The congregation grew till the building had to be enlarged and then the blow fell and my FATHER was cut off until he was left just a nub of a spire with not a bit of his old comeliness. Then I was born and they made him a "Concert Hall" instead of a church, and then put way down in the basement a "lockup" for bad people (with whom none of our family had ever associated) and as Shakespeare says (you see I hear a good deal of the classics from my ministers), "Last scene of all that ends this strange, eventful history," he was dragged away to be (how can I say it) a stable. This is the skeleton in our closet and I dislike to mention it, but the fidelity to the truth which I am continually taught impels me to tell you the facts.

But there has been one other tragedy in our family which I must reveal: My BROTHER died in his youth.

The Story of the First Church Spire

They did everything to build him up but were unsuccessful and I was put in his place. I tell you, in strictest confidence, (for I am no boaster) that I am the largest and happiest of my family. Indeed in all this good state of Connecticut there are few that compare with me and not one that excels me. I am a representative of the best type of New England architecture and I am proud of my history and my descent; yes, between us, I am proud of myself and of my dear people. I am 200 feet high, taller by 65 feet than my FATHER in his palmiest days. I love to look down upon this goodly city and upon mine own people, and watch the growth of things and the prosperity of mine own. Though just in the prime of life I have witnessed some thrilling sights which you, my little people, to whom I am telling this tale, have never seen and the like of which I hope you will never see. In my early days (did I tell you I was born in 1858?) I saw a company of young men, commanded by a member of my church, march away to the war; one of the first companies to answer the call of our good president Lincoln and our own war governor Buckingham. They went away amid the cheers and the tears of the people of the city, and other companies followed, but alas, many did not come back. I was glad they went, and O how sad I was that they did not all return; but I was thankful that they could give their lives in such a cause and that their children could live to see a REUNITED COUNTRY. I remember well the day when they dedicated the modest but suggestive monument to their memory in our beautiful cemetery, and I look away across the city now and then and talk with the SOLDIER WITH THE TRAILED ARMS who tells their story as I tell yours. I was very glad when they chose the site where my father had stood, for the



Myself and some of my First Deacons.

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shaft to tell you children of those who lived as well as of those who died. I often read, from my aery height, the record of their battles and wonder what the SOLDIER, who stands there with the sheathed sword at his side and the furled flag in his right hand, is thinking about. But he and I understand each other perfectly and I know he is glad that the war is over and he can tell his story to you as I tell mine.

It was only a little while after you celebrated your two hundredth birthday, which was the birthday of my family as well, that there was more trouble, and again I looked at the soldiers going out, but the country had grown so that it did not create such a stir as in the old days and most of these came back; but I have heard that they did brave things for a weak little people, and when men risk their lives for the good of others I am glad for they are doing just what I stand for too.

But I want to talk about ourselves for a little. I know you every one. Some of you I have known a good while. To some of you I owe my very life, and I am not forgetful that it is to you that I am indebted for my handsome proportions. Of course it is not in my power to greet you, for the very best of church spires have stiff back bones and mine has shown no signs of weakness yet. But that wayward little son of mine, who is 'Vane by name and vain by nature,' is always waving to you whenever you appear. Just you watch him the next time you have a chance. Why I never know where to find him, He is north, south, east and west at all points of the compass and forever running round the circle. I have such a sympathy for you parents for I am sure if you have half as much trouble with your children as I have with mine you are busy all the time. Yet do you know I am beginning to believe

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that after all, children have minds of their own and ought to have a little freedom. Although this child of mine does not come in when it rains he knows when it *will* rain and I see half the city glancing at him as they pass to find out what he has to say about the weather. I am very proud of the attention he attracts and the reliance people place on his judgment. I suppose I am prejudiced and think quite naturally he would be better if he were more like me, sort of stiff and substantial; when the real truth is that it is a good deal better for him and for the people to be like himself. Then there's that other child of mine—so very bashful—always with both hands before her face. I suppose it is because people look at her so frequently. I often wish she would be more retired for her bashfulness seems to me very much like coquetry. (Little children, that's a hard word and means that I think that she is just pretending, as you children do sometimes, to be bashful when really she likes attention). Yet the people do as she says. When it is twelve o'clock they have dinner, and when it is six o'clock they have supper, and when it is night and not too dark they look up at her and say, "Why, it's time to go to bed." She's a faithful little body, this daughter of mine, and if Mr. Sparks will only visit her once a week she will move regulary and her friend, the bell, who always does what she tells him, will strike the hours steadily year in and year out. This friend of ours, who lives with us, and my daughter are very much interested in each other. I like him too, though when he speaks all my timbers shake; but he rings out so clearly and calls my people so well that I think, with my child, that he is the finest bell in town. But there I go, just like parents, when I get to talking about my children I never know when to stop.



Soldiers' Monument, Wooster Cemetery.



The Spot Where my Father Stood.

The Story of the First Church Spire

Now while I know you all by sight some of you I know quite intimately. A few of the people have visited me and I am on most excellent terms with the Society's Committee who now and then give me a new coat of paint. It feels fine to have a new suit and I am told that I look very handsome, but that is not for me to say.

Being one of the descendents of a charter member of the church I am most interested in its welfare. It does me good to see people come here to worship. Sunday after Sunday I watch them come. Knowing them all as I do I miss every one who stays away and wonder where he is. If I hear he is sick I anxiously wait till I hear he is better. If he has left town I wish him prosperity wherever he may be and hope he will not forget the old church. If he has 'kinder got out of the habit' I do so want him to come back. When you are married I am filled with delight and little VANE just searches as hard as ever he can for a bright day for you. And when one dies my heart goes out to you for your loss, but I know that it is well with him who goes for when you are at service and I stand proudly on guard I can hear you sing the hymns of Christian FAITH and HOPE and read from God's Word and pray to Him you love and for whom even I, a poor inanimate thing, stand; and I hear your pastor tell you of LIFE and not of death and I know, as you must know, that our Father never ceases to love you all. Then about noon the children come trooping to Sunday school and if the service in the church is not over I say, "Softly! Softly!" so they will not disturb you, but really I love the laughter of children, and no one was so glad as I when the old "tithing man" was abolished. So, dear people, you tell the story of our Father and of His Christ, in your life and in your words. I can only open my doors and furnish you

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shelter. I can only stand for Him ; you can go about and work for Him everywhere. You created me, but He created you and gave you the wisdom to carve me from the forests He planted, and mould me into shape for your use. It is your life in me which gives me the only life I have, and should you leave me I should become cold and neglected indeed, and soon pass into decay. But while you live I want to live and rejoice in all the good things you have ; and if it should come to pass that you should outgrow my protection you may tear me down but do not forget to build another SPIRE in my place and try to make him as handsome and as proud of you as I am. The other night my pastor arose and went to the study window to look at me, for he is one of my most ardent admirers. The moon-light played about me and I suppose I *was* very beautiful, and as he sat there I told him my story and sang this song to him :

“I am the spire of the old First church.
I rise high above the earth
And my point reaches for the clouds.
Four square to all the winds that blow I stand.
Tempest's shock or lightning's flash fright me not.
Winter's cold and summer's heat neither freeze nor melt me.
Rain or shine are indifferent to me.
But the bustle of the day and the peace of the night appeal
to me.
I behold the woes and joys of all men,
But I love mine own people best.
For them, and through them for the world, my life is lived.
The bell in my tower marks the procession of the hours and
the march of the day.
But, heedless of Time's flight, I forever point the way to God,
And in my heart of hearts I cry, 'O my people, follow Him
who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.' ”
My song is ended.
My tale is told.

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